Resistance through Cooperation: Christian Missions in Colonial America Seen through the Eyes of the Indian Converts

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Resistance through Cooperation:Christian Missions in Colonial America Seen through the Eyes of the Indian Converts

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The study of the Christian missions in the New World renders it possible to analyse the forms of coexistence of persons belonging to different cultural and political systems and drawn together because of their role in the mission enterprise in a two-way cultural transmission: on the one hand social change provoked by the introduction of a new religion among the natives, on the other the development and transformation of the perception of "self" and "other" within the missionary church under the impact of the mission field experience. It also opens up methodological problems applying to anthropological (ethnohistorical) interpretation of written sources concerning the non-literate societies observed by Europeans.

The Christian missions in general represent a result of two contesting goals. On the one hand, there had been a desire on the part of the missionaries themselves to fulfill Christ's appeal to spread the "good news." They thus undertook, to a certain extent, a "civilizing" task, spreading Christian (*i.e.* European) values and concepts. On the other hand, after the encounter with the New World in 1492 there arose a constantly renewed hope among the Reform Christian thinkers of finding there human beings untouched by the evils corrupting European society on the eve of the modern period, people ready to receive the Gospel and to become paragons for the rest of mankind. The preaching of Christian principles had thus often been accompanied by attempts to establish in overseas possessions a new social order, inspired by the communities of the first Christians as well as by the ideal constitutions of the Classical philosophers.[1] With these objectives in view, Catholic as well as Protestant missionaries often gave up the idea of educating the whole of the native population. Instead, they brought their project to life within isolated mission settlements, situated in the regions on the margin of the already "civilized," colonized and settled territories, out of reach of the white population.

But the peculiar situation of the frontier — the area of colonization in progress — brought them up against new problems and new dilemmas. Willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, the missionaries became the vanguard of the society — the Old World society — they intended to change. Their activity was inseparable from the general process of colonization. They themselves carried with them to the wilderness their own "cultural baggage" of

[1] It is not by chance that Thomas More placed his island Utopia in the vicinity of the South American coast and that he declared the traveller Raphael Hythloday to be a member of the fourth expedition of Amerigo Vespucci. For the Christian utopias see, for example, A. Housková and M. Procházka (eds), *Utopías del Nuevo Mundo / Utopias of the New World* (Prague: Czech Academy of Sciences, 1992).

ideas, usages and prejudices stemming from the Old World traditions; besides, the monarchs and colonial governments had entrusted them with the exploration of the yet unknown lands and the administration of recently conquered territories.

Nowadays, the Christian missionaries are often blamed for if not deliberately at least unconsciously destroying the native cultures, for mercilessly imposing upon them their own world views and asking them to "commit cultural suicide,"[2] splintering the aboriginal societies from within, while the desire for land and profits from trade on the part of other Europeans was devastating them from without. An opposite, equally wrong approach to the mission problematics is the uncritical adoration of its white protagonists, is either as donors bringing the blessings of civilized life to the native converts, or as fierce defenders of the latter's unspoiled aboriginal way of life. It should not be denied that missionaries caused both intended and unintended change in material culture as well as in the world view of the native converts.

In contradistinction to the active role attributed to the missionaries, the native converts acquire surprisingly passive characteristics in the historiography of the American missions. Chroniclers belonging to one mission church or another ascribe their acceptance of the gospel solely to the eloquence and hard work of the missionaries and to the power of the Holy Spirit;[3] the opponents of the missionaries think of the Indians as submitting to the force that was an inevitable constituent of the mission praxis or simply being "fooled"[4] into accepting Christianity and the new way of life.

However, the recipients of the new influences promoted in the missions never accepted them passively, even when systematic cultural, economical and military pressure had been brought to bear upon them. To be on the defensive — as the American Indians were — does not imply the total loss of initiative. The goals and motivations of those natives who, provoked by the rapid changes brought about by the approaching white colonizers, flocked into the mission towns, certainly differed from those of their white teachers. Of course, it is all

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[2] J. O'Donnell, "Who is there to mourn for Logan? No one! The Native American Crisis in the Ohio Country", in *Ohio in the American Revolution: A Conference to Commemorate the 200th Anniversary of the Ft. Gower Resolves*, ed. by T. H. Smith (Columbus: 1976), p. 19. For a discussion of this topic, see the miscellanea *Missionaries, Anthropologists, and Cultural Change (Studies in Third World Societies 25)*, (Williamsburg: College of William and Mary, 1985).

[3] This is especially the case of the historians of the Jesuit missions. In seeking to explain native interest in and acceptance of the Jesuits, they have, above all, emphasized the exceptional character of the Jesuits as individuals and as an organization for directed culture change. Historians such as Francis Parkman (*The Jesuits in North America in the Seventeenth Century*, Boston, 1867) and Herbert Eugene Bolton (*Rim of Christendom: A Biography of E. F. Kino*, New York, 1936) picked up the great man theme, emphasizing the Jesuit discipline, training and devotion; other authors stressed the humanistic education and moral philosophy of the Society of Jesus.

[4] J.-L. Rieupeyrout, *Histoire des Navajos, une saga indienne 1540–1990* (Paris: 1991). "It was less the reality of his religion and more the threat of extinction," states Vine Deloria (*Custer Died for Your Sins*, New York: Avon, 1969, p. 106).

but impossible to ascertain why particular individuals sought conversion; we can only assume some possible combination of spiritual and secular motives.

Comparative analysis of the native converts' motivations for joining the various mission communities on the American continent — Catholic as well as Protestant ones — and their active participation in these religious and social experiments enabled me to study the phenomenon of adaptive resistance. By this term, I understand active, non-violent, creative acceptance, adjustment to and / or refusal of aspects of the dominant culture, way of life, scale of values, etc. on the part of the "vanquished" who, in the new situation after the encounter with the white colonizers, sought at least partly to preserve their identity and power. These adaptive resistance strategies can be found among the inhabitants of two types of mission towns: namely, the Jesuit missions in the northern borderlands of New Spain and the Protestant "Moravian" missions in Pennsylvania and the Ohio Valley. Even though the Moravian missions commenced one and a half century later then the Jesuit ones, I will start with these, because they more clearly reveal the main features of my concept.

In 1727 the so called Unity of Brethren or Moravian Church[5] emerged in Upper Lusatia (Saxony), where the non-Catholic religious exiles from northern Moravia together with "sectarians" from various German lands founded a town named Herrnhut. They were in line with the tradition of the ancient Czech Protestant church, Unity of Brethern (Unitas Fratrum) which was born in the stormy period of the religious wars of the fifteenth century. However, more than the heritage of the Czech and Moravian ancestors, the Herrnhut community was a product of seventeenth and eighteenth century "Pietism," a reform movement within German Lutheranism.[6]

Already in the 1730s the newly formed church embarked on a massive expansion into European Protestant countries. This had been urged by the impending overcrowding of Herrnhut, the insecure legal status of the Moravian fugitives in Saxony, but also by a desire to share the acquired grace with others. Their expansion took the form of founding new towns inhabited exclusively by the church members (Herrnhaag in Wetterau, Sarepta in Russia, Fulneck in Great Britain, Bethlehem and Nazareth in Pennsylvania, etc.) and organizing them according to the model of Herrnhut. At the same time, missions were set up among European Christian denominations as well as among "pagans" in Greenland, the Caribbean, continental North America, South Africa and India.[7]

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[5] Within a few decades, the founders of Herrnhut who came from Moravia represented just a small minority of the church membership. In this essay, I am using the adjective "Moravian" strictly in the sense of the church affiliation, not to denote the "nationality" or place of birth of any individal.

[6] From the vast literature on this topic, see the voluminous *Geschichte des Pietismus, Band. 1. Das 17. und frühe 18. Jahrhundert,* ed. by M. Brecht (Göttingen: Vandehoeck and Ruprecht, 1993).

[7] For the history of the Herrnhut Unity of Brethren see D. Cranz, *Alte und Neue Brüder-Historie oder kurz gefaßte Geschichte der Evangelischen Brüder-Unität in den ältern Zeiten und insonderheit in dem gegenwärtigen Jahrhundert* (Barby / Leipzig: 1771); J. T. Hamilton and

After unsuccessful attempts in the British colony of New York in the 1740's, the Herrnhut representatives started to build isolated mission towns in western Pennsylvania. After the Seven-Year War, they were forced to relocate them in the Ohio Valley. Between 1772 and 1780, the most flourishing years in the history of Moravian missions to the Indians of North America, five mission settlements represented a combined total of 400 converts. But in the course of the Revolutionary War, the British authorities ordered their deportation by force from the strategic Ohio region, and when some converts returned to the abandoned missions the next spring (1781), they were massacred by the American militia troops. The survivors with their teachers rejoined Upper Canada, under British protection, but their mission community, Fairfield, was destroyed by the Americans during the war of 1812. The last of the missions, built again in Ohio, declined and finally proved such a financial burden to the Moravian Church that it was abandoned in 1824 and subsequently, the whole Native American mission programme was dropped, although the church itself has continued its activities until today in Europe as well as on American soil.[8]

When debating the problem of the Native American participation in this Moravian mission experiment, one must keep in mind the important fact that in the frontier region of colonial British America none of the power groups involved (colonial governments, settlers, missionaries, or various Indian groups) could dictate to others or ignore them.[9] Their mutual relations were thus the product of constantly adjusting goals and objectives. The British colonial authorities, at least in theory, respected the sovereignty of Indian tribes on unceded territories, and the missionary activities of any individual or church group were considered a strictly private enterprise.

So, the Moravians could not rely on any political, military or financial support. They had to ask the tribal councils for permission before founding a new mission town, they had to negotiate and persuade the natives, they could not command them. In spite of this, there were, altogether, thousands of Indians of half a dozen tribes (preponderantly Delawares) who joined the missions and subjected themselves to the strict discipline and a completely new way of life.[10] Although

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K. G. Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church* (Bethlehem: Interprovincial Board of Christian Education and Moravian Church in America, 1967).

[8] G. H. Loskiel, *Geschichte der Mission der evangelischen Brüder unter den Indianer in Nordamerika* (Barby 1789); J. Heckewelder, *A Narrative of the Mission of the United Brethern among the Delaware and Mohegan Indians* (Philadelphia: McCarty and Davis, 1820).

[9] My considerations take for their starting point an exellent monography of R. White, *The Middle Ground. Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[10] The question of motivation of conversion was, in the case of Moravians, studied for their African converts: R. Price, *Alabi's World,* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), deals with the "free Negroes" (cimmarrons) of Surinam; J. F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan. The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), with the black slaves owned by the Moravians in the American South. The problematics of the Native American converts has been, up to now, ignored.

they did not leave direct testimonies, we can find indirect traces of the reasons for their decision in the official sources of the Moravian Church — the mission diaries, correspondence and the so-called *Lebenslaufe*, or biographies, which were written by members of the church during their lives or by friends or ministers immediately after their death and then read aloud during the funeral.

One of the constant topics of these documents is the omnipresent famines in the frontier region, caused by the game depletion due to the fur trade, by white encroachment and intertribal wars. The yearly inventories of the inhabitants clearly show that there had always been more women then men in the missions, primarily widows and single mothers with small children, and many of the men were old, sick or crippled.[11] The missions swelled especially in the early spring, the most critical period of the year. In summer and fall, many of their inhabitants left to go hunting and returned only a couple of months later — when the need again pressed.

In the Moravian missions there developed a mixture of European and Indian-style economy. To be sure, Delawares, like other North American natives, were in no way "untouched by European civilization" when the Moravians came. The use of steel tools and fire arms or, for example, the raising of hogs (as well as the knowledge that there were of several rival Christian religions) had become acquired in the mid-eighteenth century not by only the Indian groups in the immediate neighbourhood of the white settlers, but suprisingly far in the American interior. There was a growing interest in agriculture among these Indians even before the coming of the missionaries, an interest that the Moravians praised and promoted. But more than the missionaries' inveighing against idleness, it was the introduction of new staple foods, combined with their traditional activities, that enabled the Indians to tide over the critical periods and to avert famines. The mission diaries record that while in the spring Indians made maple sugar, in the fall they prepared sauerkraut under the supervision of their German teachers. They were even able to sell the surplus to the neighbouring settlers, as well as such products as canoes or baskets.

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[11] This statistical analysis is possible thanks to the Moravian custom of distributing the name of the inhabitants in their registers into group or "choirs," delineated according to sex and marital status: small children, boys, girls, single men, single women, married men, married women, widowers, widows, sometimes with a note like "Anton, the lame one." These groups usually attended divine services separately. In the diary of the Moravian Mission of Fairfield, Canada, we read for October 4th, 1792: "Many Chippewas went by there to do their winter hunting for which they stay until spring. Among them there was a family that had a lame man and an old man with them, whom they could not take along because they intended going overland. They requested leaving them here with us and, at the same time, that we give them something to eat now and then, if they become needy, so that they would remain alive […]. We decided to grant them this request […]. This was reported to the brothers and sisters [*i.e.* the Indians] and they were urged to impart bodily and spiritual nourishment to them." (*David Zeisberger's Official Diary, Fairfield, 1791–1795*, transl. and ed. by P. E. Mueller, *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society*, Vol. XIX, Part I, Nazareth: Whitefield House, 1963, pp.144–145).

Because the gains from these activities were reinvested in the missions themselves, or largely used to establish new mission towns, the Indians for the most part cooperated voluntarily in the agricultural production and communal hunts. Moreover, especially in the first phase of their mission activity, the Moravian ministers were urged by the Church leader, the German Count Nicolas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, to concentrate only on the preaching of the faith and not to criticize the lifestyle of the converts. Zinzendorf assumed the presence of morals, laws and the notion of the existence of God even among "pagans"; he had serious doubts about the future of European "so called Christians"[12] and set his hopes for a Christian revival on the inhabitants of other continents. Because of this, the missionaries must seek to combine the best features of non-European traditions with the ideals and traditions of the Protestant Church.[13] This theory was reflected, for example, in the conciliatory attitude of the Moravians towards Indian polygamy. They were convinced that they "could not oblige a man that had, before his conversion, taken more than one wife, to put away one, or more of them,"[14] even though they did not allow the already baptized natives to take more than one wife. While this practice differed from the general opinion of the Christian missionaries, Protestant as well as Catholic, it certainly increased the attractiveness of the Moravian missions.

Even though the Moravians could not use force to persuade or punish the Indians, baptized and "pagan" alike, life in the missions was subjected to the strict rules drawn up by the missionaries and regularly (once a year) read aloud which all the inhabitants were expected to respect. "If," stated the missionary David Zeisberger, "these ordinances did not please them, or were too severe, the door was always open to them to go."[15] These rules in the first place copied, of course, the Ten Commandments ("Everyone who wants to live among us must adore and worship God alone"; "None [shall live with us] who steals"; "No son or daughter who abuses their parents"). The complementary regulations reflected the native usages most severely condemned by the missionaries: the Indians were forbidden to "go to feasts and dances," "bring rum or whiskey into our town to get drunk, or to make others drunk" or "paint, shave, shear or dress themselves as the heathens do."[16]

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12 A. G. Spangenberg, September 1743, quoted in J. B. Brickstein, "The Second 'Sea Congregation,' 1743", *Transactions of Moravian Historical Society*, 1, 3 (1876), p. 116.

13 [N. L. von Zinzendorf], *Texte zur Mission*, ed. by Helmut Bintz (Hamburg: Friedrich Wittig Verlag, 1979).

14 A. G. Spangenberg, *An Account of the Manner in which the Unitas Fratrum, or United Brethren, preach the gospel, and carry on their Missions* (London:1788), pp. 99–100.

15 *Diary of David Zeisberger, a Moravian Missionary among the Indians of Ohio*, vol. 2, trans. and ed. by E. F. Bliss (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke 1885), p. 314. Sometimes, harsher methods had to be applied, as in the case of several young Indian women in Farfield at the beginning of the 19th century who, "expelled for bad conduct, still remained in the town […]. We [the missionaries] decided to make an example of them and instructed the helpers to tell them that, if they did not leave, their houses would be torn down." (Diary Fairfield, p. 789).

16 "Rules of the Ohio mission Schönbrunn", in J. Heckewelder, *A Narrative of the Mission*, pp. 122–124.

Altogether, this moral code represented a certain limitation of freedom, but at the same time it gave a firm frame to the life of the Moravian converts, for the most part men and women driven out of their original territories by the whites and demoralized by the wars and hunger they experienced before coming to the missions. The Moravians offered them a chance to get back strength and energy, as individuals and as a group, and the minutely detailed schedule could give, at least to some, a sense of normality, could enable them to find their legs again. This aspect of the Christian mission is more important than it seems, in a "fragmentary, distorted world,"[17] turbulent and unpredictable, marked by the colonial antagonisms of the European powers, the advancement of white settlers and the slow, frustrating decline of Indian power.

The Indian converts also appreciated the strict pacifism of the Moravians, an integral part of the religious message they preached. In spite of the common perception of North American Indians as fierce warriors, the inhabitants of the Moravian mission towns frequently held to this principle with great tenacity, despite the hardships it brought. Pacifism did allow them to escape from the seemingly incessant warfare and harrassment which had plagued Eastern Indians in the frontier area since the seventeenth century. However, it represented a considerable change of behaviour of all that marked the "Christian Indians," and it forced the converts to leave their traditional tribal structure and frequently placed them under pressure from their fellow tribesmen as well as from the whites (Frenchmen, British and later Americans) in their search for Indian allies. These pressures culminated in the massacre of 1781.

To repeat, the pacifist character of the missions appealed to the persons we can call socially disadvantaged. However, there were also several chiefs and other leaders who asked for baptism, accepted Christian names and actively entered the mission life. What did they look for?

The Delaware chiefs definitely recognized the possibilities offered by the mission centres. When the growing pressure of the white settlers in Pennsylvania in the first half of the eighteenth century intensified after the signing of several treaties unfavourable to the Indians which induced the majority of the Delaware tribe to set out westward, the Delaware council — the supreme organ of the whole tribe — invited the Moravian missionaries to Ohio and asked them to share their knowledge with the Delawares. The council also invited the numerous Moravian converts from Pennsylvania, with the purpose of strengthening the Delaware tribe for the future conflicts with the approaching settlers and with enemy native groups. The Moravians soon became aware of the background to this invitation,[18] and eventually the expectations of the chiefs were not fulfilled: the newcomers didn't join the tribe in its fight against the

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17 White, *The Middle Ground*, pp. 2–3.

18 The leading missionary David Zeisberger stated in 1779: "Self-interest, and not a real desire for the Gospel, had induced the Delaware chiefs to offer the Christian Indians a home. They wanted to strengthen their tribe by incorporating with it so prosperous a community." (E. de Schweinitz, *The Life and Times of David Zeisberger, the Western Pioneer and Apostle of the Indians*, Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1871).

whites, kept to the principles of strict pacifism, and actually caused the splintering of the tribe from within.

But, through accepting the Christian religion and "civilized mores," as well as through, for example, learning to read and write, the Indian leaders could and did gain a certain prestige in their dealings with the European representatives. Besides, the centralized missions enabled them to manipulate their tribesmen more effectively, ideally to unite them against white encroachment. However, the competences of the native representatives were limited. The last word in all the inner and outer affairs remained with the white missionary in charge; and the former chiefs, if they wanted to preserve their prestige, had to adhere to the Moravian moral code, lifestyle and vocabulary, to become the best converts. When they at the same time tried to retain their traditional position, they assumed the role of "cultural brokers," as ethnohistorians designate persons functioning as mediators or "translators" between two distinct cultural systems.

Even then, because the Moravians, just as many other church groups active on the American continent, refused to consecrate native priests, the influence of the native leaders was limited solely to the secular sphere. The traditional religious leaders thus had to deploy their activities outside the missions, even though they might be seriously interested in the Christian religion. Between the years 1760 and 1810 a number of Indian "prophets" arose along the frontier. Some of them are mentioned solely in Moravian sources, while others, such as the Delaware prophet Neolin of the 1760s or the Shawnee prophet Tenskwatawa in the 1800s, we know from many other documents. But all of them called for the renewal of the "old ways"; they prohibited drunkenness, gambling etc. Their demands were thus in accordance with the precepts of mission life, even though the missionaries unanimously condemned the prophets and *vice versa*. In an attempt at moral reform and social change for their people, and perhaps to comprehend the changing world around them while impeding further assimilation, the prophets expounded a religious syncretism by blending Christian imagery and rhetoric with traditional beliefs. The prophets as well as the missionaries held that life is meaningless without some transcendent frame of reference.[19]

The eloquence of the prophets took for its principal target the drinking of rum. The widespread phenomenon of excessive drinking and drunkenness can be seen as a type of passive resistance of Native Americans — and not only the Native Americans — to the outer pressures, an expression of their powerlessness. On the contrary, the moral revitalization promoted by the prophets meant an active form of resistance to the demoralization caused by European colonization. In 1805–1809, the activities of the most famous prophet, Tenskwatawa, resulted in the founding of an Indian settlement (known as Tippecanoe or Prophetstown) where the Indians would return to the "original" way of life. But even though the teaching of Tenskwatawa turned against the white missionaries (he even let one

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[19] D. P. St. John, "The Regeneration of Time: Indians Prophets and Frontier Pressures 1760-1820", *Unitas Fratrum (Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Gegenwartsfragen der Brüdergemeine)*, 21/22 (1987), pp. 49–60.

of the Moravian converts, Joshua, be burned alive as sorcerer) and against European influences in general, his own position as religious leader owes much to these influences. His rhetoric and arguments, his mode of public teaching, all bear the indisputable marks of the influence of the missionaries. The activities of the prophets can be seen as the culmination of the adaptive resistance of the Indians in the British North American frontier region.

On the other hand, there were many Indians who found spiritual fulfilment in "pure" Christianity, in this case in its Moravian variant. Certainly the Moravian converts never openly stood up to their white teachers, as happened many times in the missions of Spanish America. After less than ten years of existence (and less than a half century after the commencement of the Moravian mission activity in North America) the Ohio missions were destroyed by an outside force, independent of the will of the inhabitants. One can only speculate whether they would have been able to last out, being "left alone." But it is not possible to separate this endeavour from the advance of the white settlements and from the Indian wars that lay behind their failure. Moravian Indian missions of the eighteenth century were firmly embedded in the fluid frontier region and frontier society. They offered refuge to those most affected by the approaching colonizers and by the impact of the colonial wars; they enabled them to maneuver in the situation caused by these wars; but they could not protect them completely.

In the Jesuit missions in the northern borderlands of New Spain (*i.e.* contemporary Mexico) the political and legal scene was somewhat different; however, the mechanisms of adaptive resistance that developed among part of the Native converts took a similar shape.

The Society of Jesus, formally approved by Pope Paul III in September 1540, soon enlisted the sympathy of many of the governing elites of European Catholic countries. In the next decades, the order spread from Italy to Spain and Portugal, Central Europe and England; to India, North Africa, Brazil, China and Japan. In the year 1572 the Spanish king Philip II invited the Jesuits to New Spain and nineteen years later, in 1591, they established their first permanent mission in contemporary Sinaloa.

In accordance with Spanish colonial legislation,[20] the Jesuits entered the newly conquered territories in the north, alone or accompanied by the army and subsidized from the royal treasury, and gathered the natives in settlements modelled after the Spanish towns. These communities were designed to prepare the way for civil colonization and further exploitation of the potential riches of the newly discovered regions. It was supposed that after a certain time — ideally, after ten or twenty years — the missions would be "secularized" (*i.e.* changed into regular parishes and handed over to the secular clergy) and the Jesuit missionaries would move on to a new field. However, this hope was not fulfilled and the major part of the missions remained in the hands of the

[20] *Recopilación de las leyes de los reinos de las Indias*, 3 vol., ed. by I. Sánchez Barba (México: Porrúa, 1992).

Ignatians for many decades and sometimes more than a century, with the argument that the Indians were not yet ready to be turned into parishioners.

By 1678, the Jesuits had established more then 200 missions throughout all the contemporary northwestern Mexico — besides Sinaloa, in Sonora, Nayarit and Tarahumara — and had baptized close to 500,000 natives. Even though their development was interrupted by native uprisings on several occasions (in 1616, 1691, 1740, 1751, etc.) and slowed down by repeated epidemics, in general the missions experienced considerable economic growth. During the closing decade of the seventeenth century the Jesuits advanced into Baja California and southern Arizona, at the time called Pimería Alta. The mission experiment, however, ended abruptly in 1767 with the issue of the royal decree that banished the Jesuit order from Spain and its colonies. Quantitatively, thus, no comparison is possible with the Moravian project, but the characteristics of the individual settlements are similar to some degree.

Of course, in the Jesuit missions the Indians could not decide freely about their participation; and also the authority of their teachers was somewhat limited, as they perfomed their task for the benefit of the Crown. However, the natives as well as the Jesuits still retained considerable maneuvering space. The Spanish crown insisted that American Indian communities should have certain territoral rights and an autonomous self-government at the local level. Restrictions against Spanish residence in the Indian settlements — justified by their possible negative influence upon the newly converted natives — helped to ensure that native communities continued to have a cultural and territorial basis of identity.

Besides, the geographical expansion in North America created a dilemma for the Spanish crown. The vast frontier fringes were exposed to the attacks of nomadic tribes, especially the Apaches, who, already in the seventeenth century, had domesticated the horse and adapted their culture to the stimulations coming from the European presence. The Apaches raided the Spanish mining towns as well as the missions and sold the silver and cattle to Spanish middlemen in other parts of the frontier region. The Spanish forces were too meagre to defeat these Indians without the help of Indian allies from other tribes. In particular the inhabitants of the mission towns were used for this; the result was the retention of their self-confidence and their traditional way of life, especially in the mountain regions of Tarahumara and Sonora. The Indians recognized the opportunity and were by no means passive victims of Spanish encroachment.

The natives did not enjoy untrammelled freedom, of course, for they were subjected to the rules and demands of the missionaries, settlers, and royal officials while living in the missions. Nonetheless, they often could play the conflicting segments of the colonial society against one another, as well as control their own integration into Spanish colonial society and the extent to which they incorporated Catholic beliefs and practices into their lives. An analysis of their reactions is facilitated by the fact that the Jesuit sources almost mimic the Moravian ones. They left behind letters, meticulous yearly reports (although not day-by-day diaries) on the individual mission towns, and printed chronicles.

The fact that the Indians clearly understood the advantages they might gain from the presence of the missionaries in their territory is documented by the cases of the voluntary subjection of some tribes to the missions. For example, when Bishop Benito Crespo of Durango, in 1725 visited Pimería Alta (the northernmost part of the borderlands), seventy Indian messengers from several settlements ("rancherías") came to ask for missionaries.[21]

One of their reasons could be the fact that the mission Indians were exempt from tribute and from forced labour in the mines (the so called "repartimieto"). The economy of the mission was essentially agrarian, in order to provide for the subsistence needs of the neophytes. The traditional native crops — maize, squashes and beans — were supplemented with wheat and a wide variety of fruits introduced from Europe. Again, the main contribution of these new crops was that they filled the gaps in the yearly subsistence cycle (we should stress, for example, the impact of winter wheat). But it was the introduction of cattle of all kinds that brought about the greatest innovation in native diet and land use, as related to the reorganization of the Indian economy in the region.[22]

The land and all mission properties were treated as a communal patrimony; the individual Indian labourer functioned as a member of the community. As in the case of the Moravians, the Jesuit mission reoriented native economy to the production of a surplus, destined either for sale or for a reserve food supply. So, the initial contact especially was accompanied by material benefits for the natives. Besides, the Jesuits could claim the royal stipend ("limosna") which they usually spent on additional food supplies, clothes and medicines (and, of course, paintings and sculptures of saints and sacred vessels). Another important factor that made the missions more attractive for the natives was the active involment of the missionaries in the disputes of Indians and Spanish settlers over land and especially over water resources.[23]

Archaeological evidence as well as the accounts from the colonial period affirm the crushing impact of Old World diseases (smallpox, measles, etc.) that struck in the north of New Spain even more intensely then in the British west borderlands. The epidemics caused a sharp demographic decline and undermined productive strategies and long-established work, trade, and political alliances. The immediate consequences were shortages and hunger. Without surpluses, craft production and trade declined along with the power of native elites — chiefs as well as priests and shamans, unable to explain and to prevent outbreaks of disease. On the other hand, the Jesuits were willing and able to assume the rights and responsibilities formerly held by the chiefs. Drawing upon

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[21] Royal decree of October 10, 1728, cited whole in G. P. Hammond, "Pimería Alta after Kino's Time", *New Mexico Historical Review*, 4 (1929), p. 226.

[22] C. Radding de Murietta, "The function of the market in changing economic structures in the mission communities of Pimería Alta", *The Americas*, 35 (1977), pp. 155–169.

[23] These disputes left traces in many juridical documents. See, for example, the edition of Jesuit sources for the history of the north-west of New Spain, *El Noroeste de México. Documentos sobre las misiones jesuíticas, 1600-1769*, ed. by E. J. Burrus and F. Zubillaga (Mexico City: U.N.A.M., 1986).

centuries of experience in Europe, they responded quickly during epidemics, providing food, medicine and ideological framework and rituals to cope with disease.

This ability probably lay behind the fast native acceptance of Jesuit tutelage. Missionaries also effectively reconstituted native productive and organizational strategies, which faltered or collapsed in the wake of disease. In their role as priests, they offered and directed a variety of public rites that were geared not only toward diseases, but also to traditional concerns such as bringing rain and securing a good harvest. By requiring their charges to work approximately three days a week on communal lands, the Jesuits were able to realize sufficient surplus produce to support the sick and poor. It is manifest that many natives petitioned for missionaries and baptism, hoping that the priests would provide a protection from or cure for disease. This point was explicitly made in a report from 1639, recounting the establishment of a mission among the Opata of the Sonora Valley. The report noted that the natives were so convinced that baptism was a curing ritual that many parents of baptized children asked for them to be rebaptized at the first sign of illness.[24]

As stated above, joining the mission didn't bring peace to the natives. They were subjected to Apache attacks and urged by the Spaniards to participate in the war campaigns. Participation in the fighting of course enabled the native leaders to retain and even strengthen their political power. Even though the missionaries had their say in the choice of mission officials, these often became uncontrollable, especially when they made friends with the local Spanish officers. Jesuits, for example, could not prevent the Indians from celebrating traditional war rituals and were themselves eywitnesses to the torturing of prisoners.[25] On the other hand, they could assert their authority as representatives of the Spanish crown and in cases of serious transgression on the part of the Indians punish them much more severely then the Moravians. Whipping posts were erected on the main square of every mission; the Indians could not leave the mission at will, or refuse to work in the common fields. In this sense, their maneuvering space was seriously limited.

The balance of power in the northwest began to change at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Rising numbers of white settlers in the region slowly displaced the Indians in their role of defenders of the border and threatened them with loss of land and autonomy. The result was a growing number of local uprisings in the missions, which aimed more at reinstating the authority of the native war leaders within the Spanish colonial system than at liquidating the mission system in general. An excellent example is the case of Luis Oacpicagigua, known also as Luis de Sáric, leader of the uprising of the Pima Indians in 1751. This rebellion, which took the lives of two missionaries and about a hundred other whites has been interpreted by historians as a struggle to

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[24] D. T. Reff, *Disease, Depopulation and Culture Change in Northwestern New Spain, 1518–1764* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991), p. 260.

[25] See, for example, J. Nentvig, *Rudo Ensayo (Description of Sonora)*, trad. by A. F. Pradeau and R. J. Rasmussen (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980).

acquire a new "freedom from all Spaniards."[26] But we can rather interpret it as a struggle to maintain the existing status quo that ensured the Indians a relatively high prestige and living standard.

Luis de Sáric was a charismatic chief of great personal stature who expressed his influence through the Spanish cultural code. Governor of the province of Sonora, Diego Ortiz Parilla, honored him with the title *Captain General of the Pimas* for his role in leading Pima auxiliaries against the Seri tribe; he even served as a circuit court judge of Indian missions, and after the revolt it was precisely Ortiz Parrilla who released Luis from prison to help him escape punishment. It has been reported that Luis encouraged religious leaders to revitalize traditional war dances and customs, counter to the Jesuits' wishes; yet he remained ensnared in the mission system. On the other hand, many other native mission governors refused to support the conspiracy of Luis de Sáric, either because they had become reconciled to missionary teachings and genuinely converted to Christianity, or because the revolt involved the sacrifice of mission benefits. Despite its drawbacks, the mission offered advantages obvious to many Pima leaders.[27]

A unique example of initial cooperation with and subsequent rebellion against the Jesuit mission system is offered by the Yaqui tribe. Spanish forces were defeated in the war with the Yaquis in 1617 and the tribal leaders had then set the terms for mutual contact. The Jesuits entered their territory without military escort. Throughout the whole seventeenth century, missionaries were dependent on the favourable disposition of the Indians for their own personal safety and for the success of their programmes; at the same time, they worked almost without interference from Spanish military or political authorities. Spanish settlers avoided the Yaqui territory and the forced labour system was not brought into operation in it.

The Jesuits were able to persuade the Yaquis to work for the creation of surpluses of wheat, corn, and livestock, a portion of which became the basis of supply and equipment for the extension of Jesuit work in California and among the Opata and Pima missions to the northwest. Each town had several formal officeholders, combining the functions of local government, ceremonial management, and military organization. Dealings with outsiders were channelled through the missionaries, most of whom maintained residence for extended periods in the native communities. This kind of cooperation continued with little interruption until the 1730s.

Among the "Yaquería" there emerged a new cultural system, a product of the interaction of the Yaquis with the relatively few Europeans who introduced a special selection of Spanish cultural elements; it involved intensive Yaqui participation, to a large extent on their own terms. The one-strand linkage with the Spanish empire, almost exclusively through the eccesiastical organization,

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[26] J. A. Donohue, After Kino (Roma: Jesuit Historical Intitute, 1969), p. 90.

[27] See R. M. Salmón, "A Marginal Man. Luis of Saric and the Pima Revolt of 1751", *The Americas*, 45 (1988), pp. 61–77.

resulted in the vitalizing of Yaqui society and a new, higher level of integration. The intensified utilization of the local resources was highly visible to members of the local communities as they participated in the wider programs of Jesuit mission extension. Cultural change among the Yaquis steadily took the course of stimulation of a new intertown entity which began to see itself as distinct from the colonial society of New Spain.

But the Jesuits had strengthened their own position by the 1700s, and by this time Spanish settlers and the Spanish civil authorities started to appear after the opening of silver mines in the Yaqui territory. In addition to the direct threat which it posed to Jesuit interests, this change of authority had serious implications for the ability of the Yaquis to retain control of their own lands.[28] When, finally, a revolt occurred in 1740, the churches and the missionaries apparently suffered very little. None of the Jesuits were killed, they were simply escorted away from the tribal territory. After all, the Yaquis appreciated the relative advantages of mission life. The suppression of the revolt was, then, followed by the first effective assertion of military power over the Yaquis and a temporary elimination of the missionaries. A fort was established at the edge of Yaqui country and Spanish settlers became more numerous.

Just as in British North America, the engagement of the Jesuits in the northern borderlands provoked the rise of religious syncretism. The natives added or reworked Christian concepts and rituals according to existing belief systems. For example, in the mountain religion of Tarahumara, in the inaccesible ravines lived "bad Christians" (in the eyes of the Jesuit commentator) who "used an earthen vessel for calix and wooden slide for patena, a mortar and a stone... they made into the bell" in imitation of the Catholic mass.[29] These natives risked much more than the North American prophets, because the Spanish authorities punished severely the "apostates" who already had accepted baptism.

These syncretic rituals bring us to the problem of conversion that we already touched on when speaking about the Moravian missions — a key problem in understanding the complexity of mission culture. Many critiques of the mission experiment have argued that native conversions were not legitimate, that the Indians understood little and cared less about Christian teaching, that their conversion was mere lipservice for political or economic gain and the missionaries were either intentionally exaggerating or mistaken in claiming success.[30] They have emphasized the necessity of internal changes in individual

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[28] Edward H. Spicer, "Political Incorporation and Cultural Change in New Spain. A Study in Spanish-Indian Relations", in *Attitudes of Colonial Powers Toward the American Indian*, ed. by Howard Peckham and Charles Gibson (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1969), pp. 107–135.

[29] Letter of P. Joseph Miqueo to P. Provincial Cristóbal de Escobar y Llamas, Nuestra Señora de Loreto de Yoquibo, March 7, 1745 [Archivo General de la Nación, México, Jesuitas, leg. I-16, exp. 11].

[30] See for example B. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers. Canada's "Heroical Age" Reconsidered (*Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), pp. 294–296; or F. Jennings, *The Invasion of America. Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (New York: Norton, 1975), pp. 228–254. Only James Axtell is persuaded that a good number of Indians were

converts. But, although perhaps useful up to a point in the investigation of conversion in contemporary western societies, this perspective should not be applied to the historical study of conversion in a transcultural context. In culture contact situations the establishment of political and cultural domination, the resistance to such domination, and other aspects of the power relations between the engaged societies all influence the process of religious conversion.[31]

Christianity may have truly satisfied some new intellectual and emotional hunger of the American Indians. But, more importantly, by accepting the Christian minister or priest as the functional equivalent of a native shaman and by giving traditional meanings to Christian rites, dogmas, and deities, the Indians ensured the survival of their culture. As James Axtell states, even though accepting the mission entailed wholesale cultural changes, it preserved their ethnic identity as particular American Indian groups on familiar pieces of land that carried their inner history; it enabled the natives to prosper on their own terms.

> Only if we continue to see the precontact Indian as the only real Indian, as the 'noble savage' in other words, can we mourn his loss of innocence. Only if we persist in equating courage with mortal resistance to the forces of change can we condemn the praying Indians as cultural cop-outs or moral cowards. For life is preferable to death, and those who bend to live are also possessed of courage, the courage to change and to live.[32]

"receptive to the solutions offered by the new religion and were capable of taking the decisive step from their own religions to the new, without deceiving themselves, the missionaries, or us." (J. Axtell, *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 100).

[31] W. L. Merrill, Conversion and Colonialism in Northern Mexiko, in *Conversion to Christianity*, ed. by R. W. Hepner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 141–163.

[32] J. Axtell, *After Columbus*, p. 52.